

Homily 23rd Sunday of the Year – 5th September 2021

Its quite telling when you have a funeral, or a baptism, or even a Wedding, in the parish, how many people say to the priest; “oh well leave it to you to pick the readings” – The implications being, we do not know the Gospel well enough to chose a suitable reading. – I sort of groan at that.

Sighing or groaning that these baptised Catholic Christian people don't have the confidence to choose a Gospel reading for their special sacrament.

In the Gospel today, from Mark, where Jesus heals the deaf and dumb man, he sighs/groans, - which is unusual for Him.

Why does he sigh or groan, is he finding the miracle of healing a deaf mute a trying experience? No, not at all.....He is groaning in despair because the man in front of him is an impressive symbol of those who have eyes and ears but neither see or hear, those who have been given the God news, but do not listen.

Of those who cannot speak in words that come from God; not hear in words that come form God. You cannot be a true Catholic priest unless you read and speak the Gospel. You cannot be a true Chrisitan unless you know and share in the Gospel. That it marks our whole outlook in life; putting it in to practise.

As St Augustine once wrote, “faith learns on the Word of God; not on miracles”. I remember, being out in Kenya in a poor parish in the south west of the country; on a Sunday the families came to Mass, bringing babes at the breast and grannies gently guided by the hand. After Mass which lasted at least 2 hours, in the afternoon, following a simple lunch, the young adults gathered for ‘Chumuya’ – which means ‘small Christian Community’.

We gathered in someone's home, usually made of mud and straw. There we prayed and then spent at least an hour discussing the Gospel reading for that Sunday. Examining the message, commenting on the text, reflecting on the meaning for our time.... then finishing with a prayer, a song and a cup of tea, As St James writes in the second reading it is the ‘poorer people’ who are spiritually rich in faith and Heirs to the Kingdom of God.

St Paul reminds us on several occasions to have our eyes and ears fixed on Christ. To the people of Colossae, he says “Keep your mind fixed on things that are heavenly” – “Your real life is Christ” “Let Christ's message in all its richness live in your hearts”. Treasure God's word.

The deafness and blindness to Christ in the Western World is Colossal – I don't mind if you switch off from my sermons, but please don't switch off from hearing and living out the Gospel.

All the time we are choosing the message we want to hear.... on our mobiles, our iPad and laptops – on our TV screens and radios, in the magazines and body that that we read. – Disordered people fill their ears with disordered messages; converted sinners, fill their hearts and minds, with words that come from God. If you starve the brain of oxygen then ultimately, we die.

If you starve the mind and soul of the message of Christ then our Catholic Christianity will die, our faith will die. In many respects we are spiritually on ‘life support’ using religion only in emergency situations, only calling on God when desperate for a miracle.

Is this really a relationship pf mutual love and fidelity? Of course not!

Jesus in the Gospel, commands the man who is healed, not to tell anyone but get on with his life. Why does Jesus do this? – Because Jesus is not wanting his ministry to be solely a miracle ‘Crusade’. His primary mission is to call us to Faith! A living breathing faith, that celebrates the sacraments, hears the Holy Gospel and prepares us all for the Kingdom of God. The language of faith is Divine love; it doesn’t matter that Jesus cried out in Greek for the deaf + dumb man to be opened, - “Ephphatha”. He could have said it in any world language – and the message would be the same –

“Be opened to Christ!”

“Be opened to the Gospel”

“Love the Gospel”

“Pray the Gospel”

“Live the Gospel”

Ill finish with the recommendation of St Paul, “Let the message of Christ, in all its richness find a place deep inside you”.

God Bless you all,

Fr Jeremy C Bath